DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 284 150 CG 020 083

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TITLE Understanding the Problem of Pornography.
INSTITUTION Family Research Council of America, Inc., Washington, DC.
PUB DATE Dec 86
NOTE 17p.
AVAILABLE FROM Family Research Council of America, Inc., 515 Second St., N.E., Washington, DC 20002 ($5.00 suggested contribution for 1-5 copies, discounts for larger orders, all amounts tax deductible).
PUB TYPE Guides - General (050) -- Reports - General (140)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Child Abuse; *Legal Problems; *Moral Issues; *Obscenity; *Pornography; Sexual Abuse; *Sexuality

ABSTRACT

This report was written to clarify the terms often associated with pornography and to help readers understand the issue of pornography more clearly. The first chapter defines pornography, as it was defined by the United States Attorney General's Commission on Pornography, as "that material (which) is predominantly sexually explicit and intended primarily for the purpose of arousal." Four basic legal categories of pornography are then explained: (1) obscenity; (2) indecency; (3) child pornography; and (4) constitutionally-protected materials. The second section of the report poses commonly asked questions about pornography and discusses answers. Topics covered include research evidence that pornographic materials are harmful; views of the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography; First Amendment and censorship violation issues; other types of pornography; and the role of organized crime in the production and distribution of pornographic materials. The last two sections present key pornographic statistics, lists of Supreme Court cases, and anti-pornography organizations, endnotes, and selected literature for further reading. (NB)

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A SPECIAL FRC PUBLICATION

Understanding the Problem of PORNOGRAPHY

by

Leigh Ann Metzger, *Director*
Pornography Commission Report Project

CG 020083

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Foreword

By the time the U.S. Attorney General's Commission on Pornography issued its report in July, 1986, a carefully-orchestrated attempt to discredit the Commissioners and the report's findings was well under way. This deliberate sabotage of the report was not the result of a reasoned, objective evaluation of the Commission's findings. (How can one objectively analyze a document until it is released?) Instead, there is evidence to suggest that this disinformation campaign was being spearheaded by some of the kingpins of the pornography industry who stood to lose a lot if the Commission's recommendations were adopted.

Amidst the confusion surrounding the release of the report, the Pornography Commission Report Project arose. The purpose of this project was to educate and inform the public about the key findings and recommendations made by the Attorney General's Commission; and to do so in an accurate, straightforward manner. Accordingly, a fact sheet was prepared, interviews were coordinated for many of the Commissioners, newspaper columns were written, and public speeches were delivered.

Not long after this public education project began, it became clear that many citizens were confused by the use of a number of different terms often associated with pornography. As a result, project director Leigh Ann Metzger has written this report to clarify this confusion.

Leigh Ann is to be commended for her superb leadership of the Pornography Commission Report Project, and for her ability to translate the maze of legal jargon into a very readable and informative booklet.

I believe this guide will enable you, the reader, to understand the issue of pornography more clearly, and, therefore, come to reasoned and responsible action in your community. The Family Research Council is pleased to play a role in this process.

Gerald P. Regier
President

Understanding the Problem of PORNOGRAPHY

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I: What is Pornography?

Pornography. To some, the word pornography conjures up images of scantilly-clad women in provocative poses. To others, it connotes something much more explicit.

Whatever the visual image, one thing is clear—pornography is a controversial subject fraught with confusion. There is confusion over terms and legal concepts, confusion over what can and cannot be regulated, and confusion over what citizens can legally do to combat pornography in their community.

So what is pornography? The U.S. Attorney General's Commission on Pornography, which issued its final report in July, 1986, defined pornography as "that material (which) is predominantly sexually explicit and intended primarily for the purpose of arousal."[1] This broad definition encompasses four basic legal categories of pornography: (1) obscenity, (2) indecency, (3) child pornography, and (4) constitutionally-protected materials.

Obscenity

Obscenity is a category of pornography outlawed by the federal government and by criminal statutes in most states. It does not enjoy protection under the First Amendment to our Constitution. Obscenity as a modern legal term was established in the 1957 U.S. Supreme Court case, *Roth v. United States.* This landmark decision provided a definition for "obscene" materials which was further clarified in the *Miller v. California* case in 1973. According to *Miller,* for material to be legally obscene, it must meet this three part test:

(1) *The average person, applying contemporary standards, would find that the work, taken as a whole, appeals to the prurient interest; and*

(2) *the work depicts or describes, in a patently offensive way, sexually explicit conduct specifically defined by the applicable state or federal law; and*

(3) *the work, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value.*

If material is found "obscene" by a judge and jury, based on this definition, then that work is illegal and carries the penalties of appropriate state and federal laws. The U.S. Criminal Code prohibits interstate transportation, distribution, and sale of obscene materials, while states have corresponding laws for similar violations within their borders. Obscenity law can apply to any medium of communication (book, movie, magazine, video, etc.).

Title 18, Chapter 71, U.S. Criminal Code
1461—Mailing obscene or crime-inciting matter.
1462—Importation or transportation of obscene matter.
1463—Mailing indecent matter on wrappers or envelopes.
1464—Broadcasting obscene language.
1465—Transportation of obscene matters for sale/distribution.

The *Miller* test protects serious literary works from being considered obscene or illegal. Subsequent court decisions have reinforced the guarantee that prosecution of serious works is not permitted under the law. Some materials that have been found obscene repeatedly include the films *Deep Throat, Debbie Does Dallas,* and *The Devil in Miss Jones.*

1

Indecency

Indecency is a category of pornography which involves standards established by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) for governing radio and television broadcasts. Under existing law, the FCC has the power to impose restrictions against certain words and visual images that are sexually explicit even when the material is not legally obscene.

In the 1978 case, *FCC v. Pacifica*, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of this type of regulation because of the pervasive nature of radio and television. Since it is virtually impossible to prevent young children from receiving pornographic information carried by the broadcasting media, FCC restrictions are permissible even though the message itself may not always meet the legal definition of obscenity.

From a legal standpoint, indecency only applies to broadcasting. Although violations of decency standards do not carry criminal penalties, the FCC can impose fines or revoke licenses for such violations.

Perhaps the most notorious example of indecency was the daytime broadcast of George Carlin's "Seven Dirty Words" monologue (which was the impetus for the *Pacifica* case). Some attorneys speculate that many R-rated movies shown on television today could also fall into this category.

Child Pornography

Child pornography generally refers to the depiction of children performing various sexual acts in photographs, cartoons, paintings, and other created impressions. In the specific legal sense, child pornography is "limited to works that visually depict sexual conduct by children below a specified age," (*Ferber v. New York*, 1982). This means that only actual depictions of real children are outlawed as child pornography under federal and state criminal laws.

Title 18, Chapter 110, U.S. Criminal Code
2251—Unlawful to sexually exploit children.
2252—Unlawful to produce, receive, distribute, etc. material involving the sexual exploitation of children.
2253—Criminal forfeiture for violations.
2254—Civil forfeiture.
2255—Definitions for chapter.

It is important to note that a child cannot legally consent to sexual relations. Thus, unlawful forms of child pornography cannot be made without the actual sexual abuse of a child. The Child Protection Act of 1984 strengthened U.S. Criminal Code restrictions preventing the production, transportation, distribution, and sale of these exploitative materials.

Materials that have been prosecuted as child pornography include the publications *Lisa and Her Dog, Lolita*, and *Lolly Tots*.

Constitutionally Protected Materials

Constitutionally protected materials constitute a very broad category of pornography which includes anything that does not meet the legal definitions of obscenity, indecency, or child pornography. These materials include a number of the sexually-oriented publications often referred to as "men's magazines" which are sold in supermarkets, convenience stores, and bookstores.

While constitutionally-protected materials may contain photographs that considered alone might be legally obscene, when the *Miller* test is applied to

the whole publication, serious literary, artistic, scientific, or political value can be found. Hence, these materials cannot be banned by government action, but their accessibility to minors can be limited by carefully drafted display laws, harm to minors regulations, and nuisance laws. Moreover, citizens who object to the sale of "soft core" pornography can voice their concerns to storeowners, band together with other community members, and exert economic pressure if necessary to discourage merchants from selling such materials. Action of this kind is totally permissible under the First Amendment and does not constitute censorship.

Sexually-explicit magazines, like *Playboy* and *Cosmopolitan*, which have never (to date) been found legally obscene represent a common form of constitutionally-protected materials.

Summary

Legal protections and restrictions for each form of pornography (obscenity, indecency, child pornography, and constitutionally protected materials) differ greatly. Accordingly, concerted action on the part of citizens and leaders is necessary if pornography is to be controlled in our society.

To be effective in combating the negative effects of pornography, the U.S. Department of Justice must crack down on interstate distributors of illegal materials, state and local authorities must prosecute distributors and retailers of illegal materials within their boundaries, the FCC must regulate unlawful broadcasts, businesses must represent the will of the community and refuse to sell objectionable pornographic materials, and parents and community leaders must closely monitor and prevent the accessibility of pornographic materials to minors.

II. Answers to Common Questions

Q: Is there any research evidence to suggest that pornographic materials are harmful?

A: "Harm" is one of the buzzwords often used in a discussion of pornography. Pornographers and civil libertarians insist that there should be conclusive proof of harm before controls or restrictions on materials are legally allowed. While evidence of harm is certainly beneficial in restricting pornography, it is not legally required.

Nevertheless, there is a wealth of scientific evidence that supports the contention that prolonged exposure to sexually explicit depictions produces negative effects. While this research evidence is limited because it cannot test the real consumer in the real world context and cannot ethically test results on children, it does provide these indications:

- Research conducted by **Dolf Zillmann** of the University of Indiana found that massive exposure to non-violent, non-coercive "standard fare" pornography desensitizes people to rape as a criminal offense.[2]
- Research by **Edward Donnerstein** of the University of Wisconsin expanded Zillmann's findings to include massive exposure to violent pornographic materials.[3]

- University of Houston researcher **Jennings Bryant** found that viewers of pornography become used to violence as a means of arousal. Over time, a more and more intense level of violent excitement is needed to stimulate the pornography user.[4]
- **Zillmann and Bryant** established that massive exposure to non-violent, non-coercive pornography creates a desire for more deviant materials including violence in a sexual content (such as sado-masochism and rape).[5]
- In her book, *Rape and Marriage*, feminist author **Diana Russell** found that an appetite for deviant behavior following exposure to pornography is closely associated with the abuse of women. In addition, she found that pornography often leads both males and females to experience considerable conflict, suffering, and sexual dissatisfaction.[6]
- Research by **Ann Burgess** of the University of Pennsylvania indicated that while adults often refuse requests to engage in normal or deviant sexual behavior, children usually do not. In fact, pedophiles often use pornography to lower the inhibitions of children and legitimize both normal and aberrant sexual behavior.[7]
- **Victor Cline** of the University of Utah documented an almost universal syndrome in his experiments on the effects of exposure to pornography over time. The first thing that happens to males who become immersed in pornography is that they become obsessed or addicted to pornographic materials. They keep going back for more and more. Second, they require more explicit and ever more deviant types of sexual material to become sexually aroused. The third effect is desensitization. Books, magazines, films, and other materials that were originally perceived as shocking, taboo-breaking, or immoral are in time seen as acceptable and commonplace. Finally, there is often a tendency for users of pornography to act out what they have seen.[8]
- Under the sponsorship of the Department of Justice, **Dr. Cline** conducted a pilot field study of the effects of dial-a-porn on children. Cline interviewed 14 children who had called pre-recorded pornographic telephone messages and found that in each case children did not cease calling such numbers until they were caught. Moreover, callers had a very vivid recall of what they had heard.[9]

Q: What did the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography have to say about harm?

A: In assessing the data on harm, the Pornography Commission divided pornographic materials into four categories: (1) sexually-explicit materials which contain depictions of violence; (2) sexually-explicit materials which depict degradation, humiliation, or subordination; (3) sexually explicit materials which do not contain depictions of violence or degradation; and (4) materials which depict simple nudity.

The Commission heard testimony from more than 200 witnesses, including social scientists, clinicians, law enforcement officers, criminal offenders, social workers, pornography victims, and others. Based on this data and other research collected, the Commission found that categories (1) and (2) both demonstrated "negative effects," and that category (3) demonstrated some "negative effects" and some "mixed results." While category (4) materials were not found harmful, a majority of the Commissioners agreed that materials in this category (and in all other categories) are "morally objectionable."

Q: Do controls, regulations, and the prosecution of obscene materials represent a violation of the First Amendment or censorship?

A: Purveyors of pornography often use terms like "censorship," "book-burning," and "McCarthyism" to attack anti-pornography efforts and divert attention from the real problems of pornography. They attempt to obscure the fact that the First Amendment does not automatically protect every use of pictures or words.

The Supreme Court made it clear in *Roth v. United States* that obscenity was not protected by the First Amendment. Moreover, the court established a three-part obscenity test in *Miller v. California* that clearly delineates between those materials which are constitutionally protected and those which are illegal.

In another landmark case, *Paris Adult Theatre v. Slaton* (1973), the court explained the principle that legal obscenity is not really speech at all as defined by the First Amendment.

Paris went on to affirm that simply because obscene films are exhibited to "consenting adults" does not grant them immunity and protection. The court held that no one, regardless of age, can "consent" to an illegality.

Therefore, obscenity can be regulated without having to meet the standards of "clear and present danger" applicable to all common forms of free speech. As U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice Warren Burger affirmed in *Jacobellis v. Ohio,* (1964), "The desire to maintain the quality of life and the total community environment is an adequate legal basis for the regulation of obscenity."

Q: What about other types of pornography—are citizens advocating censorship when they object to the showing of sexually explicit television programs or object to the sale of certain magazines or videocassettes in their area?

A: No. The First Amendment guarantees all citizens the right to attempt to influence action and speak out for community standards. Economic boycotts organized by citizen groups are a safe legal activity designed to persuade or alter undesirable practices.

First Amendment to U.S. Constitution

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

Q: What role does organized crime play in the production and distribution of pornographic materials?

A: "It is practically impossible to be in the retail end of the pornography industry (today) without dealing in some fashion with . . . either the Mafia or some other facet of . . . highly organized crime," a 23-year veteran of the Federal Bureau of Investigation told the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography.[10]

A Chicago policeman and obscenity expert agreed: "If they (organized crim-

inals) do not own the business outright, they most certainly extract street tax from independent smut peddlers."[11]

The FBI's study of the pornography industry in the late 1970s concluded, "Organized crime involvement in pornography is indeed significant. . . . Few pornographers can operate in the U.S. independently without some involvement with organized crime."[12]

Due to the absence of significant law enforcement activity, the pornography industry is very attractive to organized criminal activity. Profits from pornography sales are easily hidden from the Internal Revenue Service, and these tax-free profits are often poured into other criminal enterprises. For example, one organized crime family used profits from the movie *Deep Throat* to finance drug smuggling operations in the Caribbean.[13]

In addition, organized criminal activity in the pornography industry has led to many other related criminal activities, including murder, arson, extortion, sexual abuse of children, money laundering, copyright violations, fraud, firearms violations and illegal gambling.

III: Key Pornography Statistics

- Approximately 80 percent of all sexually explicit films and videos are made in Los Angeles.[14]

- In 1985, nearly 100 full-length pornographic films were distributed to approximately 700 "adults only" theatres. These theatres sold an estimated two million tickets each week with $50 million in annual box office receipts.[15]

- In California, Dial-A-Porn providers earn $1.26 per call while the telephone company collects 74 cents.[16]

- Since 1970, defenders of pornography have often cited the work of a Danish researcher named Kutchinsky who claimed that sex crimes dropped after the legalization of all sexually explicit materials. Kutchinsky said that the availability of pornography provides a "safety valve" and that people use pornography instead of fulfilling sexual impulses that are potentially dangerous. Closer examination of Kutchinsky's work shows that the figures appeared lower after the legalization of pornography because police stopped reporting some sex crimes. There is no other evidence to support Kutchinsky's views.[17]

- A correlative study found that rape rates are highest in states which have high sales of sexually explicit materials and lax restrictions and enforcement of pornography.[18]

- Rapists are 15 times as likely as non-offenders to have had exposure to "hard-core" pornography before the age of 10.[19]

- A crackdown on adult bookstores, X-rated movie theatres, and massage parlors in Cincinnati resulted in a 42 percent decrease in assaults, prostitu-

tion, and drug trafficking, and an 83 percent drop in rapes, robberies, and aggravated assaults.[20]

- The pornography industry grosses nearly $8 billion annually.[21]
- A study of Michigan State Police Department Lieutenant Darrell Pope showed that 41 percent of the 38,000 sexual assault cases on file in Michigan involved some use of pornographic materials during or just prior to the act.[22]
- Adult bookstores outnumber McDonald's restaurants in the United States by a margin of at least three to one.[23]
- In a March, 1985, Gallup poll, 73 percent of the American public believed that viewing sexually explicit magazines leads some people to commit rape or sexual violence.[24]
- In a January, 1986 poll of *Woman's Day* readers, 90 percent said that pornography encourages violence against women, and nearly one-half said they believed their children had been harmed by exposure to pornography.[25]

IV: References

Supreme Court Cases

Roth v. United States (1957)
Affirmed that obscenity does not enjoy First Amendment protection.

Miller v. California (1973)
Established three-point test for determining obscenity.

Paris Adult Theatre v. Salton (1973)
Held that obscene material is not immune from prosecution if provided only to consenting adults.

FCC v. Pacifica (1978)
Upheld the Federal Communications Commission's right to regulate indecent material in the broadcasting media.

New York v. Ferber (1982)
Held that child pornography can be prosecuted even if it is not legally obscene.

Anti-Pornography Organizations

Citizens for Decency Through Law
11000 Scottsdale Road
Suite 210
Scottsdale, Arizona 85254
(602) 483-8787

CDL is the oldest and largest non-profit anti-pornography organization in the United States. Its goal is the total elimination of pornographic materials that violate U.S. obscenity laws. CDL's main objectives are to inform the public of pornography's negative impact and to assist in the enforcement of obscenity laws. CDL has materials that are available upon request.

Morality in Media
475 Riverside Drive
New York, New York 10115
(212) 870-3222

Morality in Media is a national organization which has state affiliates and local chapters that are involved in citizen action and public education. Morality in Media's primary concern is stopping the traffic in pornography constitutionally. Its National Obscenity Law Center serves as a clearing house on legal information. Morality in Media has resource materials and published brochures on a variety of topics related to pornography.

National Federation for Decency
Post Office Drawer 2440
Tupelo, Mississippi 38803
(601) 844-5036

NFD is a national Christian organization that promotes the Biblical ethic of decency in American society. Its primary focus is the monitoring of television programs and other media productions. NFD has spearheaded efforts to urge convenience stores to discontinue sales of pornographic magazines.

National Coalition Against Pornography
800 Compton Road
Suite 9248
Cincinnati, Ohio 45231
(513) 521-6227

NCAP is a national organization that focuses on "hardcore" pornography and child pornography. NCAP represents a broad-based coalition of religious and community leaders.

Endnotes

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[10]Ibid, p. 86.

[11]Ibid, p. 178.

[12]*Extent of Organized Crime Involvement in Pornography,* Federal Bureau of Investigation, Washington, D.C., 1978.

[13]*Final Report of the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography,* p. 73.

[14]Ibid, p. 6.

[15]"The War Against Pornography," **Newsweek,** March 18, 1985, p. 60.

[16]*Final Report of the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography,* p. 380.

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[20]Lt. Harold Mills, Letter to Alan E. Sears, Executive Director of the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography, July 29, 1985.

[21]*Report of the Attorney General's Task Force on Family Violence*, U.S. Department of Justice, Washington, D.C., p. 112.

[22]Darrell Pope, "Does Pornographic Literature Incite Sexual Assaults?"

[23]"Effect of Pornography on Women and Children," U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee, Subcommittee on Juvenile Justice, 98th Congress, 2nd Session, 1984, p. 227.

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[25]**Woman's Day**, January 21, 1986.

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